

Seven Days a Thousand Times by GallifreyGod

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Summary:

In 1957, when a seventeen-year-old Joyce Horowitz visits Hawkins for a family funeral, she spends an unforgettable seven days with a boy who steals her heart. Little did she know how hard it would be to leave it all behind. Rule Number One? Never fall in love while you're in Hawkins.

Inspired by the song Seven Days a Thousand Times by Lee Brice.
(Listen to it before you read)

1. Monday

Author's Note:

Okurr, this did not turn out as good as I hoped. Probably because I wrote it over a span of 3 months. But, if you want a general feel of what the fic is supposed to be like, listen to the song Seven Days a Thousand Times by Lee Brice. Anywhoozles, I hope you enjoy!

*The sidewalks and streets were soaked and the sky was gray
but you should've seen her face, shining like that lighthouse
through all the rain and the way she called my name,
I've lived those seven days a thousand times.*

- Lee Brice

Hawkins. It was a small town, barely making its presence known on the map of Indiana. With the population barely over four digits, there weren't many people who didn't know everybody's name. The village was filled with trees just about everywhere you look, and the townspeople made due with a single grocery store, gas station, and church.

The thing about Hawkins is, you'd have no reason to visit without a certain intent. Occasionally a family of four would stop for gas on their way to Indianapolis, but nobody just *decided* to come to Hawkins just for shits and giggles. When a new face would appear in the town square, you could always rely on the heads to turn and the whispers to be shared.

It was basic and bland, nothing ever happened in Hawkins. Betty Sue Miller's book club would meet on Thursdays, Benny's Burgers would serve fish fry on Lent Fridays, the town gathered under the lights for a Saturday night football game, and you best find yourself in the front pew for Pastor Jeffries' Sunday mass. *There really wasn't much else that Hawkins had to offer.*

And that's exactly what Joyce Horowitz mumbled to herself as her

father's truck drove down the rainy roads. "Pipe down, Joycie. We're here for Grandad's funeral, it's not like we're moving here." William Horowitz grumbled as his fists clamped to the 10 and 2 of the steering wheel.

"I didn't even know him! I'm seventeen, I could've managed to stay home. But no, I have to spend spring break out in the middle of Lord knows where!" her father was used to her snappy attitude when she was angry, but the 8-hour drive was slowly wearing down his patience.

"Joyce Margaret, if you don't quiet down back there, you're *really* not gonna like this. We're here, we're staying, deal with it!" he barked, hoping to get his point across. Just as he wished, Joyce silently buried herself deeper into the seat, her reflection mirroring into the window as the trees passed.

Elsie Horowitz set down her knitting needles and looked behind her seat at her pouting daughter. "Joy baby, I'm sure you'll find something to do while Dad and I work out the funeral plans." she smiled her normal calm and motherly smile which always made Joyce feel better. Even though she didn't always see eye to eye with her father, she'd always be a daddy's girl at heart.

The low hanging wires from the telephone poles seemed to go on forever as they drove down the abandoned Cornwallis Road. The potholes were nearly rivers from the downpour which only seemed to loosen the bolts on the tires even more. In Joyce's mind, she'd rather be anywhere else than rainy old Hawkins.

"I'm sure Grandma will be happy to see you, Joycie. I don't think she's seen you since you were knee height." Elsie broke the deafening silence with another smile. You can always count on Mrs. Horowitz to *try* to break the tension.

"Yeah, I can't wait to sit shiva and catch up on the last 10 years with her," Joyce replied, knowing full well that she probably shouldn't have such a cavalier attitude over the situation. She expected to hear another retort from her parents, but her mother just laughed.

"Sweetie, we're not sitting shiva!" she giggled. "You're free to do

whatever you please, all you need to do is go to the funeral. The rest is up to you! Hawkins has tons you can do! You can go to the fair, get ice cream, window shop. You name it! Who knows, maybe you'll even make a friend!"

Before Joyce could reply to her mother's annoying optimism, the truck pulled into a driveway of a house she had only ever seen in her father's box of polaroids. It was a quaint two-story home, white siding and green shutters with a wrap around porch. Somewhere buried in her youth memories, she recognized the home, but she wasn't worried about figuring out how.

"4132 Maple Street. So this is gonna be home for the next seven days." Joyce sighed as she stepped out of the truck to retrieve her bag, Deep down, she knew she should be glad that their stay wasn't any longer than a week, but her petty frustrations didn't show any signs of leaving soon.

After lugging her over-stuffed duffle up the porch steps and into the house, the smell of potpourri and Avon perfume nearly knocked Joyce off her feet. Before she could scrunch up her nose in disgust, the tiny and frail Margaret Horowitz hobbled in from the living room.

"Joycie, look at you! You've sprouted up like a weed! Did you get the birthday card I sent?" Margaret asked as she pulled Joyce in for a bone-crushing hug. Quite the grip for an 87-year-old woman, that's for sure. "Hi Grandma," she greeted with as much enthusiasm as she could muster up. "Yes I did, thank you."

"Ma, sit down! we've got it." William groaned as he helped his wife with the bags. "That is no way to greet your dear old mother, Will!"

While her father and grandmother worked out their loving bicker, Joyce turned her attention to the window. Gently peaking out into the street, she studied the cul-de-sac of homes. How could people actually live here? She knew her father grew up in Hawkins, but how could someone *actually* live day to day in such a small town? All she ever knew was Minneapolis, where she lived smack dab in the center of the city.

After everybody was unpacked in their rooms and full from Margaret's pot roast dinner, Joyce sat tucked away in the den with a book. Leaving her family to their own devices in the living room, she found herself attempting to get lost in an old F. Scott Fitzgerald book she had found lying around.

"I told that boy about the ice." Myrtle raised her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders. "These people! You have to keep after them all the time."

Joyce read and re-read the same sentence over and over again, unable to keep her focus set on the book. Suddenly, the doorbell rang and pulled Joyce from her concentration once again.

"Joy, sweetheart. Could you get that please?" Grandma Margaret called out. Joyce hauled herself off of the couch and made her way to the front door. Behind the door was a teenage boy holding a tray of lasagna

"H-hi," the boy said breathlessly, as if the wind was taken out of his lungs. "I'm Jim Hopper, the next door neighbor. I'm looking for Mrs. Horowitz?" Joyce couldn't help but smile up at him. He was at least half a foot taller than her, sandy blonde hair, and deep blue eyes. The kind of eyes you could drown in if you weren't careful.

"I'm Joyce, her granddaughter. It's nice to meet you, Jim." she giggled. "Grandma, you have a visitor," she called towards the direction of the living room before turning back to Jim with an awkward smile.

"I'm sorry to hear about your grandfather, he was a great guy." Jim frowned before remembering the pan of lasagna in his hand. "Oh! This is from my mom, she said that if you guys need anything that she is right next door."

Joyce smiled as she gracefully accepted the dinner. "Thank you so much. And truth be told, you probably knew my granddad better than I did. I haven't seen him since I was seven." she chuckled nervously. In her mind, it didn't feel right to grieve in a drastic manner since she really *didn't* know him. If anything, she felt sorrier for the people who did know him.

"He was a good man, Jonathan. Always made sure that everybody else was happy and healthy before he was. Always paid me a pretty penny to help with yard work too." the teen smiled, awkwardly shoving his hands in his pockets. Joyce could see on his face that he was nervous; hell, anybody in a ten-mile radius could see he was nervous.

"If it isn't little Jimmy Hopper! I see you've met my granddaughter, Joyce!" Margaret grinned as she patted the boy on his back. "Isn't she just beautiful!" Joyce suddenly felt like she was going to pass out. Clearly, she didn't remember her grandmother's filterless mouth.

"Very beautiful, Mrs. Horowitz. She must get it from her grandmother." Jim chuckled as he looked down at the short old woman. Joyce felt her cheeks get hot in embarrassment and suddenly the room was spinning faster and faster.

"Oh Jimmy, you are such a charmer." Margaret giggled as she playfully swatted his arm. "Maybe you could show my Joycie around Hawkins! She's going to be here for the whole week."

"Grandma..." Joyce whispered warningly under her breath as she made eye contact with the floor. Great, 4 hours into her visit and she already felt like a burden on the neighbor boy.

"I'd love to! I mean.. only if you'd like me to, Joyce. I realize that you'll probably be busy." Jim shifted his weight from foot to foot nervously. Is it hot in here?

"Uh, yeah! Yeah, I'd really like that." Joyce smiled, losing a battle of trying to will her anxiety away. She couldn't lie, this was pretty much an answer to her prayers since the last thing she wanted to do was sit around and be bored for seven days. But she also couldn't lie about the fact that Jim was pretty cute and that only made her a hell of a lot more nervous.

"Sounds good, maybe around noon we can go and walk around town?" Jim grinned nervously, hearing his heart hammer in his chest. He didn't quite understand why he was nervous, in fact, if it were any other girl in Hawkins he'd probably be trying to put the moves on her. Something about Joyce made his ego recede and suddenly he felt

like a little school boy in front of a pretty lady.

"I'll be looking forward to it." she chuckled, hoping that she wasn't seeping with awkward anxiety as she leaned against the staircase.

"Me too. Goodnight Mrs. Horowitz, Joyce." and with that, the teen disappeared out into the evening. Joyce couldn't help but laugh at her grandmother's raised eyebrows, casting her granddaughter a suggestive smile.

"He's a good boy, Joycie. I trust him with my life." Margaret patted Joyce's shoulder, reassuring her before wobbling back to the living room. Oh, so that's where the meddling genes came from.

Well after midnight, Joyce laid in bed as she struggled to fall asleep. The dog barking in the distance was the closest she could get to the busy city traffic she needed to hear to fall asleep. Occasionally a car would pass on the street, presumably going to work a night shift somewhere. The headlights would illuminate her room for a quick second before everything would go back to pure darkness.

Quietly slipping out of bed, Joyce grabbed her diary, a pack of smokes, wrapped a blanket around her arms, and padded down the stairs in her slippers. As she tiptoed out into the backyard, she flipped the dim porch light on and made her way to on. Lighting up a cigarette, she curled up with her diary and began to write.

Dear Diary,

I've been here for half of a day and I've already met such a sweet guy. He's charming, he's handsome, he's caring, and he's pretty much going to be my tour guide for the next few days. His name is Jim and his eyes look like oceans. I hate to say it but I feel so nervous when I'm near him like I'm going to say the wrong thing and push him away. Not to mention when my grandma nearly cornered him into charting me around for the next 6 days. Who knows, maybe he won't mind me as much as I think he will. I guess I -

"Hey, Joyce." a whisper came from the direction of the neighbors. Joyce nearly jumped out of her seat startled from Jim's face peeking over the fence.

"Jim? You scared me." she laughed, setting her cigarette down in the ashtray. "Whats up?"

"I couldn't sleep and I saw the back porch light come on. I don't mean to be a total creep but I saw you and wanted to make sure you're okay," he confessed, immediately embarrassed by how much he seemed like a stalker.

"Yeah, I'm okay. You wanna come sit with me?" Joyce raised her eyebrows, pointing to the empty lawn chair next to her. Jim's face lit up with a smile before he climbed over the fence to sit with her.

Joyce silently offered him a cigarette, leaning over and lighting it between his lips. "I totally understand if you don't wanna do the whole 'tour of Hawkins' thing, I know my grandma kind of cornered you about that." Deep down, Joyce really wanted to hang out with him, but not if he wasn't interested.

"I wasn't kidding," Jim said after exhaling a puff of smoke. "I really would like to show you around. I know it's probably difficult to be in a new place and only know three people. Plus with the funeral and everything, I figured you might need a friend."

Joyce shyly bit her lip as he handed her the cigarette back. "That's really sweet. Thank you." Jim could see the bashfulness that she was trying to hide, simply by the way she looked down at the ground.

"So, where are you visiting Hawkins from?" he asked, getting more comfortable in the lawn chair. He felt kind of embarrassed that he was sitting in his pajamas with a girl he just met, but she didn't really seem to mind.

"I'm from Minnesota! Well, Minneapolis really. Right in downtown. Kinda like our own miniature version of New York City." Joyce smiled, trying to tuck away the feelings of being homesick that came from thinking about it.

"Mini New York City, huh?" Jim chuckled. "I thought when people think of Minnesota that they think of cheese."

Joyce buckled out a laugh a lot louder than she hoped. "I think you've got it mixed up with Wisconsin, silly. No, Minneapolis to us is like Indianapolis to you." she grinned as his eyes sparkled, barely able to look away from them long enough to pass the cigarette back to him.

"That explains the whole 'apolis' thing. But, Wisconsin, Minnesota, same thing." Jim laughed along with her. "I've always thought that Minnesota was one of those places where there is literally nothing to do, but I guess Minneapolis is probably different." as he took another drag off the cigarette, he watched as she looked up at the stars.

"I mean, we've got theaters, museums, and all of that. Now I spend my days either at school or working at Dayton's but when I was a kid I loved to ride the streetcars around the city." Joyce bit her lip as she beamed. Something about thinking of her childhood always brought back the gleam in her eye, filling her with a warm and fuzzy feeling.

"Streetcars huh? Those are like the trolleys that you see in San Francisco, right?" Jim asked, thinking back to when he studied California in 5th grade. He had been mesmerized when he saw the cable cars in photos, spending his whole year begging the mayor to install one in Hawkins.

"Yes, exactly! When I was little my dad had to pretty much have to carry me off because I could ride it for hours and beg to keep going. By the time I was 8 all of the streetcar drivers in Minneapolis knew who I was." the two of them laughed at the thought while the night air sent shivers down both of their spines.

"Well," Jim started as he wrapped his jacket tighter around his arms. "I should probably get back before my parents find me gone and kill me. I really enjoyed talking to you." he smiled down at her as he stood up.

"Thank you for sitting with me, I really needed that. I'll see you tomorrow?" Joyce asked a little more hopeful than she had wanted it to seem like.

"Noon." he nodded gently with a grin.

"Noon." she confirmed.

2. Tuesday

Summary for the Chapter:

While Joyce is getting to know her new friend, they run into a little bit of trouble.

Joyce stared into her mahogany cheval mirror, smoothing her hands over her striped blouse. It would be a lie if she said her nerves didn't feel fried just from thinking about today. Spending the whole day with Jim? Nerve-wracking in an amazing way. She wanted the day to go as best as possible, to which she felt she had zero control over.

She threw on the best outfit she had packed, made sure her hair had a bouncy curl, wore her favorite perfume, and brushed her teeth...twice. Honestly, Joyce didn't understand why she felt the need to impress him. He had seen her wrapped up in her blanket and pajamas the night before so it wasn't like she was making a first impression, it was a third impression. But third times the charm, right?

She glanced at the clock on the wall, hoping that time had sped up somehow. '11:50' "Shit," she whispered as the second hand on the clock slowly tormented her. What was she expecting anyway? This wasn't a date, this was the nice neighbor boy offering to show her around town. He wasn't planning any backseat bingo, he was just being courteous.

A double knock at on her door startled her, pulling her out of her fog. "Joycie?" her father cautiously opened the door. "Look at you. You look nice." William smiled, seeing her dolled up more than she had been in years.

"Thanks, daddy." she grinned shyly, hoping he wasn't getting the wrong impression. Lord knows that if he thought this was a date, he'd make her cancel. Or at least she thought he would since that seemed like the type of thing he'd do.

"You look a little nervous, sweetpea. Is there anything in particular you should be nervous about?" he asked as he took off his dirty

baseball cap and sat on her bed. Joyce turned away from the mirror, standing in front of him and fidgeting with her hands.

"No, I just... unfamiliar town and a new friend." she tried to be as vague as possible about it. It wasn't like she couldn't talk to her dad, but boys and fathers aren't the best topics to be mixed.

"I know you probably won't believe me but I trust that kid. I knew his father when I was growing up and if anybody could raise a decent teen boy, it's Joe Hopper." William laughed as he thought back to his childhood years. He, Joe Hopper, and Ben Hammond causing trouble for everybody in their path. Although Jim's dad wasn't the wisest guy in middle school, he did raise a mighty fine kid. "Anyways, you've got nothing to worry about, kiddo."

"Yeah, I just wanna make a good *thir-second* impression." Joyce caught herself before she slipped. She had forgotten that her father had no clue that she had snuck out in the middle of the night and met up with Jim. *That* he'd be pretty damn peeved about

"And you will, you've already made a good first impression... or so I heard from your grandma for an hour while she gawked about Jimmy." Joyce laughed awkwardly along with her father, hoping her grandmother hadn't been too descriptive just in case she had acted a little doe-eyed around Jim.

When the doorbell rung downstairs, both William and Joyce glanced at the clock. "11:59, the kid is punctual I've gotta give him that." her father sighed before standing up. Reaching into his back pocket, he pulled out a couple dollars from his back pocket and handed it to her. "Here, sweetpea, have fun." and with a kiss on her forehead, she smiled and ran downstairs.

Swinging the door open, Joyce matched the cheerful smile on Jim's face. Today was going to be a great day.

"Nuh uh, Jayne Mansfield can act *circles* around Marilyn Monroe! I mean, did you see *The Girl Can't Help It*?" Joyce raved excitedly as

they walked down Main Street. For at least fifteen minutes they were debating on what actor is better than the other.

The day was amazing already and it had only been an hour. To be honest, Joyce had to admit she wasn't paying as much attention to Hawkins as she was talking to Jim. And to be fair, Jim wasn't paying much attention to the tour either. He tried to look at her eyes every chance he got, the deep brown irises capturing him with every glance. He couldn't explain it, he was just... drawn to her.

"Alright alright," Jim chuckled, "how about... Elizabeth Taylor or Lucille Ball?" he asked, looking down at her as she pondered. He tried not to smile too widely as he watched her twist her hair around her index finger while they walked.

"Uh, Liz Taylor. I mean, Lucille Ball is really funny but I think Elizabeth Taylor has a certain grasp on classiness that doesn't really compare." Joyce looked up at him, watching him nod in agreement. As they walked around the corner, Jim could see Merrill's Ice Cream Shack at the end of the street.

"Hey, wanna get some ice cream?" he asked, watching her face light up at the idea. As she nodded, Jim felt his heart speed up a little quicker. As they made their way down the street, they continued to debate on which star of the silver screen was better.

Walking up to the counter, Joyce and Jim stared at the menu of flavors, all seeming better than the last. "I'll get a scoop of chocolate fudge. Oh! I have money on me too." Joyce said as she reached into her pocket.

"Don't worry, I've got it. Jim smiled before turning to the man behind the window. "I'll have a banana sundae and a chocolate fudge cone for the lady." while Joyce looked around, Jim paid the man and took their ice creams to a small table.

"Here you go, bon appetit!" he smiled as he pulled out the chair for her and set her ice cream down in front of her. Joyce grinned at him, wishing that all of the guys in Minneapolis could have the same chivalry as he did.

"You want my cherry?" Jim offered as he plucked the red fruit off the top of the whipped cream.

Joyce's eyes lit up even brighter. "Thank you," she giggled before popping the cherry into her mouth, sucking it off of the stem. Jim tried not to let his expression get the best of him as he watched her.

Licking a swipe off of her dessert, Joyce turned to look at the laughing crowd of girls on the other side of the restaurant. If she was telling the truth, they kind of looked like the crowd of bitches at her school back home. "Who are those girls?"

Jim hung his head and took a deep breath. "Ah, yeah those are the cheerleaders, Chrissy, Karen, and Terry. You know the type, clinging to their ego because they have nothing else to hold onto?" The girls were clearly giggling over the two of them sitting together.

"And the greaser kid next to them? The one who looks like he should cut back on the cigarettes and hair gel?" Joyce questioned, sinking into her shoulders as her eyes met with the guy.

"Lonnie Byers. The town scum." Jim poked his tongue at his cheek as he kept his eyes focused on his plate, dragging his spoon idly over the ice cream.

Just as Joyce was about to look back at Jim, Lonnie puffed out his leather jacket and started towards the two of them, leaving the gossiping cheerleaders behind.

"Hey Hop," Lonnie smacked his lips before giving him a shit-eating grin. "What's your fatass doing here with such a fine young honey like this." the Byers kid smiled as he averted his eyes to Joyce.

"Lonnie, right? Can you do me a favor?" she smiled flirtily, dragging the nervous attention of Jim along with the greaser boy's eyes.

"Anything for you, doll." he smiled as Jim looked at Joyce with defeating betrayal in his eyes. Joyce smiled and motioned for him to come closer so she could tell him a secret. Lonnie leaned down, biting his lip as Joyce cupped her hand over her mouth and moved in closer to his ear.

"GET FUCKED!" she yelled loudly in his ear, startling everybody in the vicinity of the ice cream shop... especially Byers.

Jim couldn't hold back the laugh he choked on, watching Lonnie nearly shit his pants from her megaphoning him in the ear. As he and Joyce buckled over with laughter, Lonnie sneered and walked back to his giggling group of girls.

"Holy shit! That was amazing." Hop smiled, wiping the laughter tears away from his eyes. No girl had ever stood up to Lonnie like that, especially not in front of the entire student body. Jim knew he'd probably get his ass kicked over it but it was definitely worth it.

"Here's the thing, next time he sees you he won't know if I'm gonna come back around and make a fool of him again. That should keep him away for a while. It works back home!" Joyce giggled as she watched Jim's eyes sparkle with gratitude. As she licked her ice cream cone again, a small dab of chocolate wiped across her nose.

"You've got a little — there." Hop's thumb brushed the swipe off chocolate ice cream from her nose as gentle as could be. Joyce bit her bottom lip, trying to hold back a small grin that was breaking through. "Thanks."

As Jim's hand pulled away, Joyce couldn't stop herself from gazing into his eyes. She could've sat there for a second or an hour, she didn't know. All she could do was stare into those mesmerizing ocean blue eyes.

"So," Hop broke the silence first. "The funeral is tomorrow right?" He knew that probably wasn't the best way to end an intense moment, but who was Jim Hopper if he didn't say the wrong thing at the wrong time?

"Yeah, it starts 10:30. A-are you gonna be there?" she asked shyly, wondering if it was too much to ask him to go with her. It wasn't like it was going to be a date. *'Hey, my grandpa just died, wanna hang with me at the service.'*

"Yeah, I'll be there. Maybe we could uh - sit together?" he questioned cautiously. It had been years since he had been to a funeral so his

perception of how everything worked at a funeral probably wasn't quite up to speed.

"I'd really like that, maybe you can ride over with us." Joyce smiled, suddenly feeling a lot more uplifted on the whole situation.

With a smile back at her, he nodded. "You can count on it."

Joyce sat awake in her room while the dark of night took over the town. She stayed quiet through dinner, unable to think of anything other than her day with Jim. A soft smile stayed permanent on her face during the entire day, for the first time in a very long time.

With her blanket wrapped around her arms and a cigarette burning in the ashtray on her nightstand, she filled in the blank page of her diary.

Dear Diary,

Well, I spent the day with Jim. Its been a day and a half and I already like him. He's really sweet and I thought I was going to die when he swiped the ice cream off my nose. I know Jim is probably going to get a lot of shit after spring break for what happened today... but Lonnie deserved it. Three seconds into knowing him and I could already tell he was a massive loser. But Jim, he has this adorable laugh and its kinda like music. He does this thing where right before he's done laughing, his eyes sparkle. and-

"Joyce," Elsie stood in the doorway with a motherly smile upon her lips. She could tell from her daughter's humble silence and an unbreakable grin that something along the lines of a new friendship was budding between her and Jim.

"Yeah, mom?" Joyce answered softly, closing her diary and setting it beside her.

"You barely talked throughout dinner but you had on that pretty little bashful smile that you wear when something good happens." her mother grinned as she walked in, closing the door behind her.

"Jim is gonna come to the funeral with us tomorrow, ride over with us and sit with me." Joyce brushed a piece of hair behind her ear hoping it would hide the smile on her face. Smiling at the thought of using her grandfather's death as an excuse to sit with a cute boy probably wasn't her proudest moment.

"That's nice of him. You seem pretty taken with Jim already." Elsie snickered as her daughter whined. "Mom, we're just friends." Joyce tried to play it off as true but a blind man within 50 miles could see that there was nothing 'just friends' about the two of them.

"Alright, sweetheart. Whatever you say." her mother smiled once more before pulling Joyce into a hug. "Goodnight, baby. I'll see you in the morning for breakfast."

"Goodnight, Mom."

3. Wednesday

Summary for the Chapter:

While attending the funeral, Joyce has a revelation of sorts. It's at the after party when Hopper starts to realize what he is feeling.

Notes for the Chapter:

angst ensues.

Joyce once again found herself standing in front of her mahogany cheval mirror, smoothing her hands down the front of her black sheath dress. She stared at her reflection, watching as her dark red painted lips stayed pressed into an emotionless line. When she had first opened her eyes that morning, the sound of silence that hung over the house was deafening. Less than 72 hours in that house and she could tell that silence only occurred at night. Usually, her grandmother would be telling a story, the television would be blaring, or the stove would be searing something. But not today, only a tragic silence fell over the household.

In her head, Joyce had everything planned out for the day. Jim would arrive at 9:55 am, the five of them would ride over to the church, attend the service and the burial, ride back to the house, meet everybody for the get-together, and that would be that. Everything would go as planned and it would all be over. She wouldn't even shed a tear.

A lot of things in the past few days had surprised Joyce. She expected to walk into her grandmother's house to see Margaret sob and cry for the entire time, but that wasn't exactly how it was playing out. In many ways, Joyce started to see how she and her grandmother were alike. One case being that they were both spectacular at hiding their emotions. In some sense, Joyce could see how her grandmother desperately wanted to play hostess for her family to drive the attention away from her own emotions... Joyce just didn't want to show hers at all.

She pulled one last lint fiber off the front of her dress before throwing her purse over her shoulder. Striking a match as she walked down the stairs, she tucked a cigarette between her lips and braced herself for what was to come.

Avoiding the weeping that was coming from the living room, Joyce quickly turned on her heel to occupy herself in the kitchen. As she blank-mindedly picked through the bowl of fruit on the counter, she chose an apple and bit into it, counting that as her breakfast for the day.

"Hey, sweetpea," William said softly as he came up behind his daughter, pulling her attention away from her breakfast.

"Morning, daddy. It's weird to see you without that dirty old Firestone hat on." Joyce smiled weakly as she set her cigarette down in an ashtray. In all honesty, it was weird for her to see him in a suit too. He only ever wore suits to work but by the time she was awake in the morning, he had usually been off to start his day. The William that she knew was always in a dusty hoodie with jeans while working on a car in the driveway. It didn't settle right with her, seeing him like this. At least not for *this* event.

"Yeah, your mom won't let me wear it. She's probably right not to let me." he shifted on his feet awkwardly, trying to find the right words to share with her at this moment. God, why was this so hard? His daughter had always been his rock, ever since the moment he laid his eyes on her. Now? Now it felt like he was purposely trying to hide his emotions from her. Maybe he was, maybe he was shielding her from his pain. Pain was inevitable during a time like this, and William knew that he would always try to shield his daughter from any kind of pain as best he could.

Before the conversation became anymore awkward, both of them heard knocking at the door. "That's probably Hopper, I should get that," Joyce said before scurrying away to answer. As she opened the door to greet him, she tried to contain the excitement that was beginning to stir in her stomach.

When Joyce opened the door, Hopper's eyes widened for a fleeting second. She looked so god damn beautiful to him, even though he

could see she was clearly sad. "Good morning, Hopper." she smiled lightly as she let him in, pretending not to see the literal hearts in his eyes. He wasn't looking to bad himself, Joyce thought silently. He stood in front of her, his tux ironed and his hair neatly brushed over the top.

"Good morning to you too. You look... wow," he said breathlessly, trying not to gape at her too hard. How could he not? She looked amazing in her dress, her stunning makeup applied neatly over her eyes. "My parents are going to meet us there in a little while, but they wanted me to ask if you would like to have dinner with us tomorrow."

Joyce's heart fluttered in her chest. "Wow, that's really nice of them," she said, trying to suppress the anxiety coming on. How much had he said? If they wanted to have her over for dinner that must've meant that he had told them more about her. That sounded dumb in her head, of course he had talked about her! Obviously, they would've figured out about her if he had spent the entire day with her before. *'Ugh, stop overthinking this!'* she chastised herself silently. "That would be really nice, Hop. I mean.. only if you want me to!"

"Of course!" Jim replied a little too quickly. Meeting the parents only two days after meeting each other? That had to be a record. Well, it would be if it was a date but it wasn't... they weren't *together* like that. It was just a friendly dinner invite, nothing else.

As the five of them rode over to the church, they all seemed to be watching the cars line up the streets as they got closer. The sight had reminded Joyce of what a small town Hawkins really was. When one of them passed away, the whole community came together to mourn. As they pulled into the church parking lot, Joyce saw the countless people waiting on the lawn for the funeral to begin. There had to be hundreds! Couples ranging in ages, families with little kids running around, everybody socializing beforehand. As Joyce studied the groups of people, she hadn't realized that her hand was now perfectly intertwined with Jim's.

Once she realized they had been holding hands, her heart sped up and her cheeks turned a perfect shade of pink. When had this happened? She didn't even remember grabbing it. By the looks of it, Jim didn't seem to notice it either. What Joyce did realize was how perfect his hand felt in hers, like a puzzle piece had found its match.

Once they had all stepped out of the car, Joyce couldn't help but miss her hand in his. But she also knew if her father had seen it that he probably would've said something and she really wasn't in the mood for that today. Silently, she and Hop walked side by side up towards the crowd of Hawkins residents waiting for the funeral to begin.

Just as they reached the wave of people, the church doors opened and people started filling the pews. Joyce and Jim both followed along while her family stuck behind to chat and gracefully accept condolences.

"Do you mind if we sit behind my family? I'd like to be able to sit with you, plus I don't wanna attract any more attention than I need." Joyce couldn't imagine the stares they would get if Jim Hopper sat in the front row with the family. Another thing about small towns that she was learning, people talked.

"Not a problem at all, wherever you feel comfortable sitting," Jim said with a small smile as he walked beside her up the church steps. She whispered a grateful *thank you* before picking a pew close to her family's.

As they slid into the bench, Joyce couldn't help but feel overcome with emotions. Why was she feeling this way? She wasn't close to her grandparents, but she began to remember the small memories. One in particular of her grandfather pushing her on a dirty tire swing in his backyard when she was five years old; it stung like lightning in her ribcage. She scrunched her eyes shut tightly, hoping to ward off the pain.

Pews began filling up faster and faster and every moment became more surreal. The sight of the casket sitting in the front of the altar started to make her nauseous with anxiety. This time, she couldn't write it off as bullshit teenage angst, this was real.

Soon enough, the rest of the crowd, including her family, took their seats inside the filled church. All she wanted to do was close her eyes and keep them shut through the entire funeral. She saw her father's heartbreaking in his eyes as he took his seat and it sent an unwanted pang through her core. Why was this so hard for her? Why did she want to run out of the room that seemed to be losing oxygen faster than she could breathe it?

The pastor began his sermon and Joyce tried to focus on her breathing as best she could. She barely made it past the hymns without choking on her own breath. When she saw her father walking up to deliver his eulogy, the tears that had been threatening her eyes had finally dripped down her cheeks.

"Are you okay?" Hop mouthed his words silently, watching Joyce's tears begin to well in her eyes.

She shrugged softly, unsure if she really was okay or not. 'Or not' was most likely. She couldn't understand why she was crying! It didn't really seem fair to herself for crying when she didn't know her grandfather as well as everybody else in the room did. Maybe it was because she saw how sad her family was or maybe it was just the vibe in the room, but she couldn't stop the tears from falling.

Jim bit his lip and frowned, slowly raising his thumb to wipe away the tear on her cheek. He knew that deep down Joyce was struggling with her granddad's death no matter how well she was playing it off. He knew that she felt guilty for feeling sad and grieving for a man she hadn't seen in ten years.

Without another word exchanged between the two, Jim wrapped his arm around Joyce as she rested her head on his shoulder. She felt content in his arms, as if it was suddenly the only safe place in the whole world. The deep breath she didn't know she had been holding was finally released and overwhelming comfort finally set in. Simply being pressed tightly to him felt like a cathartic release of emotions she didn't know she had. He was warm and soft, nothing bad in the world could hurt her if she stayed tucked away in his grasp.

As she sniffled silently against him, Jim's thumb gently stroked her arm in an effort to comfort her. Soon, her tears stopped falling and

she was able to relax into him for the rest of the funeral. All she wanted to do was go home and curl up in a ball, but for now, Hop was as close to home as she could get. And that was absolutely good enough.

At least half of those who attended the funeral had also come to the memorial party at the Horowitz house. The mood felt a hundred times lighter over hors-d'oeuvres and drinks, but Joyce wouldn't know that. She and Jim were tucked away on the couch in the back den, her sleeping body curled up in his arms.

Hopper sat there with his thoughts as he gently ran his hands through her hair. He could tell from the car ride back that she was exhausted and when they had sat down to talk, she almost immediately fell asleep against him. He didn't mind. Truthfully, he wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world.

How could she possibly be so perfect? Out of nowhere, she just rides into town and suddenly he can't shake the feeling of falling for her. Ever since he laid eyes on her really. She was a dream to him. An absolute dream wrapped up in a throw blanket with stains of mascara in the corner of her eyes. He couldn't even bring himself to think about her leaving. The universe was cruel, putting someone so perfect in front of him just to take her away. It was hard to make the best of her time here when the clock counting down seemed to be coming closer and closer to the moment she's gone.

There was just something about her that he didn't understand. Her smile? Her laugh? The way she twirls a strand of her hair on her finger absentmindedly? Maybe it was the way she felt like she was spilling with love. Just being near her made him feel the need to smile until his jaw hurt. Maybe this whole thing was a dream too, maybe he'd wake up and none of it would've ever happened. God, he didn't want to ever wake up then. She was just a dream with brunette hair and big brown doe eyes.

Stirring in her sleep, she nudged and buried her head deeper into the crook of his neck. Jim knew he'd give anything in the world to wake

up to that every day for the rest of his life. There was a whole party going on just a few rooms over and yet it felt like it was only the two of them left on the planet. Did she have this power over everybody? Did everybody else feel enveloped in bliss when they were around her? Jim hoped not, he wanted to be the only man on who felt the euphoria of being around Joyce.

--

When the party was coming to a close, Hopper didn't want to bring himself to leave her. William made his way into the den to tell Jim his parents were leaving when he saw his daughter curled up and sleeping soundly against him. As a father, it was unsettling to see his baby girl laying with the neighbor boy, but he couldn't help but think it was an adorable sight to be seen. He loved Joyce, and right off the bat, he could see that she was really happy when she was around Jim.

"Hey, kid." William greeted Jim with a small smile which the younger man returned. The teen had been reading the book Joyce had left on the couch while he let her sleep undisturbed.

"Hi, um... I'm guessing my parents are wondering where I am?" Hop asked nervously as he set down the book. He knew it probably didn't look good that he was holding the man in front of his daughter while she slept.

"Yeah, I'll carry her up to bed. She's a pretty heavy sleeper." William chuckled deeply as he carefully picked Joyce up off of Jim's lap. "Uh, thanks for taking care of my Joycie today." her father whispered with an overwhelming awkwardness between the two of them.

Hopper stood up and nodded. "Not a problem at all, she's wonderful to be around. Goodnight, Mr. Horowitz, Thank you for having me today." he smiled and gave a brief wave before departing. William had to admit, he liked that kid.

Joyce woke a few hours later, alarmed and confused about her

surroundings. How did she get here? Where was Jim? What time was it? When she finally remembered falling asleep in his arms, she couldn't help but feel slightly embarrassed. She couldn't help it though, he was this overwhelming sense of warmth and she couldn't get enough of him.

Rolling over beneath the sheets, she glanced out the window. The sun was already setting, illuminating the sky with amazing pink and purple hues. Wow, how long had she slept? She shuffled in bed, sitting up and grabbing her diary off the nightstand.

Dear Diary,

I think from the moment Jim touched my hand I realized that it is going to hurt like hell when this is over. I may have jumped the gun by accidentally falling in love with a guy I barely know... or will barely get to know. I don't regret meeting him at all, that isn't what I'm saying. I guess I regret meeting him at such a bad time. I mean, how am I going to go back to my normal life when my life feels turned upside down? I'm falling in love with a guy who lives 600 miles away from me and in just a few days I have to go back to a life where I didn't know him. How is that fair?

It wasn't. It was never fair.

Notes for the Chapter:

if you can't tell by now, this is kinda where the romance is blooming.

4. Thursday

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce struggles with the realization of her feelings towards Jim

Notes for the Chapter:

this was kinda intense to write. Sorry if this fic is moving at light speed. Had to fit all of the feels into a week.

“Never fall in love while you're in Hawkins”

Thankfully, when Joyce woke up, the happy vibe had returned to the household. She could hear her dad laughing downstairs and she could smell bacon cooking on the stovetop. She quickly showered and dressed before going off to find the source of the happiness. Hopefully, the smiles and laughter would continue throughout the day

When she came into the living room, she saw her parents and grandmother huddled around a box full of polaroids. Immediately, her face lit up with a smile. "Morning," she greeted happily as she sat in a chair next to them.

"Good morning, Joycie! Your father was cleaning the attic and he found some old photos!" Margaret smiled, looking back down at a photo in her hand. It was a shot of her and Jonathan with William a few years back. Joyce's dad looked about 20 in the photo, wearing a tuxedo and a grin.

"This was at your father's wedding." Margaret beamed, handing the picture to Joyce. As they rifled through the photos, Joyce picked up a shot of her father, two kids, and another man she didn't recognize.

"Dad, who is that?" she asked, showing him the photo when an

instant smile came across his face.

"That's you and your boyfriend when you were no more than two years old. " he chirped, leaning over to get a closer look at the picture.

"He's not my boyfriend!" Joyce barked back, a little too quickly and defensively. She had already met Jim before? Well, not *met* since neither of them could possibly remember. She figured the other man was Hopper's dad since he was a spitting image of what Jim looked like today.

A knock on the door pulled Joyce out of her thoughts. "Were you expecting anybody?" she asked, nervousness creeping up into her stomach.

"No. It's probably your boyfriend." William teased, earning him an elbow nudge from her mother. Joyce glared at him as she got up to answer the door. When she opened it, her heart began to pound at the sight of Jim standing before her.

"Hi, Joyce." Hop smiled, nervously shifting on his feet as he stood in the doorway. Joyce smiled back at him, her teeth shining as bright as her eyes. She could tell he was nervous just by the way he scratched the back of his head.

"Hi, Hop. Wanna come in?" she asked.

"Well, I was actually wondering if you wanna go get breakfast with me?" he questioned. "My friend Benny's dad owns a restaurant not far from here if you're interested." *Please say yes, please say yes.* The thought repeated in his head like a mantra, begging any God that would listen for her to just say...

"Yes!" she answered, "Let me just ask my parents real quick and grab my things. Come on in!" she motioned for him to enter before running off to tell her family. When her parents graciously gave her permission, she ran as fast as her feet would carry her up the stairs to grab her purse and jacket.

A breakfast date? Wait, no. Not a *date*, he didn't say it was a date.

Just breakfast between the two of them. But she couldn't stop herself from hoping it was more than *just* breakfast. Either way, the excitement filled her from head to toe.

The two of them walked together to the restaurant, laughing and talking while consciously avoiding the topic of her falling asleep in his lap. Part of Joyce thought that was adorable while it was also completely embarrassing. She knew he understood, she had been a wreck at the funeral.

"Jesus Christ, Benny. You ever clean this place up?" Jim called out sarcastically to his best friend as he opened the door for Joyce. She chuckled lightly as she saw the look on Benny's face.

"Screw off, Hop." Benny laughed as he threw a towel over his shoulder. "Hang a tarp over the jukebox and this place could double as a chapel on Sundays!"

"Yeah, Saint Hammond's Church and Grill," Jim replied, earning a laugh from both Benny and Joyce. She wondered if it was like this all the time between them, just sarcastic banter. She didn't really have that with anybody back home since she stayed mostly to herself. It wasn't like Hawkins at all back home, people always tried to be proper and fancy to make a point of themselves. Here, everybody was so tightly knit that teasing each other didn't bother anybody.

"This is Joyce," he smiled as he looked down at her, embarrassed about his temporary loss of manners. "She's visiting from Minneapolis for a few days." Hopper tried to communicate with Ben through his eyes, pretty much saying *'don't fuck this up for me, Hammond.'*

As Benny came around the grill, he stuck his hand out to shake Joyce's. "So you're the Horowitz girl I've been hearing about, huh? Heard you gave Byers a run for his money down at Merrill's. Just for that, breakfast is on the house."

Joyce giggled quietly and looked at Hopper who was smiling like an idiot. Benny led them to their booth and scribbled down their orders

on a small notebook. Two orders of biscuits and gravy, *which Jim swore by*, and two coffees.

"So," Jim started, absentmindedly playing with a packet of sugar. "Is there anything else that you would like to do b-before you leave?" *Damn it.* Hopper heard himself stutter when his words sent a pang in his chest. She left Sunday morning, only leaving two days for them to spend together.

"I'm not really sure. Is there anything we haven't seen yet?" she asked, taking a sip of her coffee.

"The county fair starts tomorrow!" Jim beamed at the thought, "It's probably one of the most fun nights of the year." He knew everybody would be there, maybe she could give Lonnie the business again and embarrass him in front of the whole town. Or maybe just being under the stars with a bag full of cotton candy would be better.

"Oh my gosh, I've never been to the fair!" she squealed excitedly, her eyes lighting up with joy at the idea. Back at home, the closest carnival was almost an hour and a half away but she had never been able to attend. Her father's work schedule always got in the way and her parents didn't like the idea of her driving that far by herself.

"Well, then it's a da- it's... it's a plan." *Date.* Jim wanted to punch himself in the face for that. Who was he kidding, she probably didn't even think of him that way. It probably hadn't even crossed her mind let alone become a *thing* between them.

"So, um.." Jim cleared his throat nervously. "My parents, I think I mentioned, were wondering if you were interested in having dinner with us tonight." Wow, when he heard his own words it sounded like an obsession. They had pretty much spent every waking moment together since she arrived. Was she getting bored of him?

Once again, Joyce stood in the floor length mirror as she inspected her outfit. A nice skirt and a maroon sweater, she hoped she looked proper enough for dinner with Jim's parents. Saying she was nervous

was an understatement, she was petrified. What if they didn't like her? What if they told her that she shouldn't be around Jim?

No. That's silly! They wouldn't have invited her if they didn't like her, *right*? God, she hoped so. His parents seemed nice at the funeral, even though she didn't get to talk to them. How bad could it be? Their parents were friends and apparently, they had been friends long before they even knew each other's names, at least according to the photos. Maybe she was overthinking this. Definitely, she was definitely overthinking this. It would go fine.

As Joyce heard the knock on the door downstairs, she was pulled out of her thoughts. After quickly fixing her hair, she ran down the stairs, grabbing a plate of cookies, and swung the door open as she tried not to act completely out of breath. "Hi,"

"Hi! Ready for dinner?" Jim asked, smiling ear to ear. She could tell he had put effort into his look since it was the first time she had seen him in a sweater. He looked cute enough to make her heart pound, that much was for sure.

"Absolutely. You look nice." Joyce smiled, closing the door behind her as they walked. "I brought cookies, I hope that's okay," she said bashfully, looking down at her feet as they walked.

Hopper laughed and looked down at the plate she was holding. "If they're as good as they look, it's perfectly fine with me." He could tell just by looking at her that she was nervous as hell and probably ready to go back home and lock herself in her room. To be honest, he was just as nervous. Not that he had any reason to be since his parents had gushed about how beautiful she had grown up to be.

The walk was short, given that it was only next door. Joyce couldn't feel herself breathing anymore. When Hopper opened the door, both of his parents stood smiling in the foyer to greet her. Well, at least they looked happy to see her.

"Joyce! Oh, it's so good to see you. You've grown up so much." Mrs. Hopper gushed as Joyce smiled bashfully.

"It's good to see you too, Mr-*Chief* and Mrs. Hopper. Thank you for

inviting me to dinner" Good, her voice still worked. Maybe this wouldn't be so bad. They would sit down, enjoy dinner, and nothing horrible would happen.

"Please, call me Meredith. Are those your Grandma Margaret's famous chocolate chip cookies?" Mrs. Hopper asked with a sly smile as she eyed the plate. Jim felt embarrassment creeping up into his stomach. *Of course*, his mother would be acting like this.

"Oh! Yes, they are. Fresh out of the oven just for you." Joyce smiled as she handed the plate to Meredith, feeling her smile grow with every passing second. She couldn't understand why she was so surprised that they were nice, it wasn't like they were serial killers.

"Thank you so much! They will be perfect for dessert, speaking of which, dinner is ready! I hope you like pork-chops." As she took the plate from Joyce, Mrs. Hopper scurried away to lead them to the meal.

"Love them." Joyce smiled up at Hop as they followed. The room was filled to the brim with an amazing smell of homecooked food. She felt at home here, so open and welcoming. As dinner was served, they all sat around the table and caught up. Joyce tried her best not to shove food in her mouth impolitely, but *damn*, Mrs. Hopper could make a mean pork chop.

"So, Joyce." Chief Hopper smiled. "Is life treating your family good in Minneapolis?" he asked, taking a bite from his plate.

"Yes, very much so. We've been very lucky that the economy has been getting better and my father's firm has been thriving." Joyce replied, hoping she didn't sound too braggish. She knew her father was one of the few people who had made it out of Hawkins alive.

"Minneapolis. It must be so busy there." Mrs. Hopper added with her eyes wide in amazement.

"I believe you described it as a *miniature New York City*, right?" Jim laughed as he looked at her. Just from the glance at him, Joyce could see such pride in his eyes. Almost like gratification. He looked so proud to be sitting next to her.

Joyce giggled, "Yes, it's quite busy there. I guess you get used to it after a while. I mean, I don't know life outside of Minneapolis much but I can see the drastic difference from there and here." Something felt different talking about her hometown now. She didn't feel attached to it as much as she did before, maybe it was because she never wanted to go back again? Almost like she had no right to be claiming Minneapolis as hers since her heart wasn't there.

As the conversation went on, happiness swelled inside of her. But somehow, it all came to a screeching halt. Someone had said something well the rest of them laughed.

That was the moment she felt her body go cold. Dead in the middle of laughter with the boy she loved and his parents. It hit her like a ton of bricks. It felt like it was all moving in slow motion; smiling, laughing, and boom. Isn't that how it always happens. Pure heartbreak.

This wasn't going to last forever.

She was supposed to be here. Hawkins, this was where her heart needed to stay. Minneapolis had nothing for her, not like Hawkins did. She wasn't living her real life right now, and soon she'd have no choice but to go back to it all. None of this was real. This wasn't her life, she wasn't going to be in this moment ever again. This was it.

Once Joyce shut the door behind her, the smile on her face died as well as her control over her emotions. Immediately, tears streamed down her face and her lungs fell short of her breath. She tried to stifle her cries but gasping sobs escaped through her. She threw her purse in the corner of the room and sat down on her bed with a thump, her face burying in her hands as she bawled.

This isn't fair. This isn't fucking fair.

She wanted to scream, trash the room, lay on the ground and cry; in her mind, she was doing all of those things.

This wasn't fucking fair!

Behind the sounds of her cries, she didn't hear her father enter the room. He had seen her lip quivering beneath the forced smile when she had walked in the door. That little lip quiver, that had always been the number one sign his daughter was trying not to crack.

William kneeled down in front of Joyce, gently holding his daughter's shoulders as she tried harder to bite back the tears. Just from watching her lip quiver, he could tell she was already in way too deep.

He knew it would happen the moment Jim walked into the house. He knew because it happened to him when he was her age. Elsie had only been visiting Hawkins for a few days as a teenager and when he had met her, he knew in his heart she was the only person for him. Within days of meeting each other, he had fallen just like his daughter did; just to have Elsie go back home a week later. It tore him apart until he saw her face again, just like he had seen happening to Joyce in front of his very eyes.

"I don't think I can leave, Dad. I mean...I didn't expect it to happen!" she whimpered. "But it happened all at once." Joyce cried, more burning tears striking down her cheeks with pools of mascara.

"I know, baby," he whispered as he brushed a lock of hair behind her ear. "I wish I could make it easier." For a moment, he feared he'd shed his own tears just from seeing her so broken apart. He knew he could sit and say *'you've only known him a short while,'* but he also knew how hypocritical that sounded. When he was her age, he would've given anything for his father to support him like he wanted to support Joyce.

"It's gonna hurt like hell and I just don't know if I can handle that." she sobbed, falling forward into his arms as she tried to keep from crying harder; ultimately failing. She came to Hawkins for a funeral, not to fall in love just to have it ripped away right in front of her eyes.

"But I'm sure you'll be able to keep in contact with him! Write letters, call every night, visit in the summer. This isn't goodbye forever,

Joycie... it's just a 'see you later'. he spoke softly, rubbing her back as he tried to comfort her.

"Dad, he's gonna move on with his life. I can't hold him back from that when I'll be almost 600 miles away from him. He's gonna graduate in the summer and go off to college. I can't hold him down when he has so much of the world to see." she sniffled against the sleeve of her shirt, averting her eyes to the floor. She hated when people saw her cry, especially her parents.

'Honey, I wish I had the right answers but I'm afraid there just aren't any at this point. But remember, things always happen for a reason. If it's meant to be, it will be.' That wasn't good enough for her. How could any of it ever 'be' when she was so far away?

Dear Diary,

Fuck the world. Literally, fuck the world. Whoever was in charge of creating my life events, fuck you too. This shouldn't be happening. What did I do to deserve amazing happiness ripped away from me? I've got a day and a half left with the one person I wanna have a million days left with. I can't imagine myself leaving Hawkins now and I have no choice. I never understood life, or how people thought it started when you met the right person; now I understand it more than ever. This isn't fucking fair!

P.S. Never fall in love while you're in Hawkins.

5. Friday

Summary for the Chapter:

A fun day ends in an even better night.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hate writing smut. I love reading it, I hate writing it, so please excuse this awful writing. thanks

Surprisingly, Joyce had managed to spend most of the day without Hopper. It didn't feel right being without him but she didn't know if she could face him after the breakdown she had the day before. It was all becoming real now, this wasn't going to last forever.

There was still a day and a half left until she went home, who knows what could happen? Maybe in some unrealistic world, her parents would decide to stay for another week. No, she knew that wasn't going to happen. But tonight she intended to make the best of it. She and Jim would go to the carnival and escape the pain of heartbreak for a few hours. They deserved that much.

The fair was unlike anything she had ever seen in her entire life. Her eyes lit up with amazement from the moment they arrived, it was magical. The rides, the games, the sounds, the smells, the colors, it was mesmerizing to her. Not as mesmerizing as it was when Hopper took her hand and led her to the center of it all.

"So, what do you wanna do first?" he asked, smiling wide at her joyous expression. She looked so beautiful when she was amazed, pure wonder across her face. With all of the lights sparkling in her eyes, he couldn't think of any other place he'd rather be than right there.

"I-I don't know. I mean, I've never been to one of these places before." Joyce replied, looking around and trying to take in her surroundings.

It was overwhelming, everything happening at once. Overwhelming and amazing.

"How about games first? Hopper suggested, Joyce nodding in agreement. Of course, Hopper wasn't going to tell her that he had a bone to pick with the kid who was supposed to be running the Milk Bottle Toss booth. No better time to show off the mean curveball he had learned to throw.

As they walked up to the booth, Hopper saw Robert Henderson's face turn sour. He slammed his change down on the counter and gave Rob a shit-eating grin. The teen handed Hop the softballs and scowled; the two had an on-going feud for as long as they could remember. Worse than him and Lonnie.

"This is for every time you've slammed my head in my locker," Hopper whispered, concentrating on the stack of milk bottles. With a quick jerk of his arm, the 6 milk bottles toppled to the ground. Joyce was impressed, Robert was annoyed, and Hopper couldn't wipe the smile off of his face. *"The lady will take the biggest teddy bear you've got."*

Joyce couldn't wipe the grin off her face as the scowling teen handed Hopper a giant pink teddy bear. "You up for a turn?" he asked, smiling down at her as he tucked the bear under his arm.

"Hm, I don't think I could beat that. But, I will kick your ass at skee-ball." she laughed, wanting nothing more than to lean over and kiss him right there.

"Oh you're on," he replied with a chuckle, taking her hand and leading her to the other games. Joyce couldn't feel the pang of sadness in her chest anymore, only glee as they continued through the fair. It was nice to finally escape everything for a little while, just spend time with him while they laughed.

She did, in fact, kick his ass at skee-ball and a handful of other games as well. Hopper had to admit, she did get a little competitive but his pride wasn't *too* damaged. It was nice to see her have fun, especially after the whole funeral ordeal.

A bag of cotton candy, a plate of funnel cake, and seven games later,

the two of them settled onto the Ferris Wheel to take a break. She wasn't the biggest fan of heights or what could possibly be shoddy carnival rides, but being with Hopper put a little bit of ease to her nerves.

As they reached the top, both of them could hear snide laughter coming from the car below them. Joyce turned around to look for the source when she, *of course*, saw Lonnie with the three of his cheerleader girlfriends. "It's that stupid greaser kid!"

"Just ignore them, Joyce. They're stupid." but Joyce didn't listen. Instead, she fished a penny out of her purse and chucked it at the car below her, hitting Lonnie right in the eye.

"Ready for round two?" she called out, the group immediately halting their snickering and slouching in their seats. "Thought not. Keep the penny."

Hopper couldn't contain his laughter, she was too feisty for her own good. He liked that about her. Not many people would have the guts to stand up to Byers, especially enough to shut him up for five minutes. Joyce watched him giggling behind the giant pink teddy bear. Definitely not a bad first trip to the fair.

Joyce wrapped a blanket around herself and made her way out to the backyard. It felt funny, sitting in the same outdoor couch with the same blanket and diary as she did on the first night in Hawkins. The night had been amazing, but as the stars stood above her, she truly felt it coming to an end.

Dear Diary,

It was hard to look Jim in the eyes after my break down, but once I did... God, I felt myself drowning in those baby blues. Tomorrow is my last day with him, I can't tell if I should make the most of it or just crawl into bed and cry. How am I going to do this? I think deep down my fears are mostly based upon the fact that I may never see him again. He'll probably forget all about me when I leave, go off and marry a pretty girl who can

be with him all the time. He'll have a bunch of kids and a nice life and I won't be a part of that equation. I came to Hawkins with only the feeling of dread, now I have to leave with that same feeling. I thought Hawkins would be a burden, I was so wrong. Most people can't wait to get out of a small town, now I can't wait to come back. Diary, I'm so afraid of losing him.

Looking over to her left, Joyce saw a light flick on inside the Hopper's house. Even a few hundred feet away she could see Jim's face through the window. He must've seen her too as he looked over and waved at her.

"Wanna come down?" she mouthed the words, pointing to the open seat next to her. He nodded and quickly disappeared before entering the gate to her backyard. "Hey," he whispered, taking a seat next to her. She couldn't think of anything other than how cute he looked with a Hawkins Tigers hoodie on and flannel pajamas.

"I had lots of fun tonight, thank you for *mmp*h-" her words were quickly cut off as Hopper gently took her face into his hands, pressing his lips against hers.

Finally.

Joyce wrapped her arm around his neck, pulling him closer as her mouth opened to his. She wanted to cry, it felt like she had been waiting an eternity for this. To finally be this close to him, coming home to his body like he had been by her side all along.

They moved together, gently guiding her onto his lap as she pulled the blanket over her back; their lips never separating. She wanted this. She wanted this more than she's ever wanted anything in her entire life. She wanted to feel him, touch him, kiss him, love him. She only wanted him.

Joyce couldn't hold back a small moan that escaped, trying not to grind into his thighs as he clawed at her back. This was dangerous, they could be caught by a number of people at any moment. She didn't care, all she cared about was never letting her mouth leave his. She could still taste the cotton candy on his tongue.

She knew this wasn't a good idea but she couldn't stop herself. If they did this it would only be that much harder to leave him. No matter what reservations she had, her hips still kept moving and her lips never stopped.

Between a million gasping kisses, her nightgown was pulled up and his pajamas pulled down. Joyce sunk down onto him with a gasp, trying to adjust quickly to his size. Hopper's hands roamed her body, one finding her bottom and one to her breast.

She shivered as she began moving against him, his length fitting inside her like a missing piece of a puzzle. God, how she wanted to scream and moan as loud as she could without the risk of getting caught. The hand that was on her breast came down to her aching center, careful fingers stroking her in all the right spots. Her skin felt electric against his touch, nerve endings crying out as his skin rubbed against her.

As his fingers moved skillfully against her clit, Joyce bit her lip with a breathy moan. "*Oh, fuck,*" she whimpered under her breath as she starved off her impending climax. She didn't want this to end yet but his fingers knew all of the right places to instantly set her off. She rested her head in the crook of his neck, kissing his skin every chance she got. She lost control of her movements, unable to pace her thrusts into his lap.

"Joyce, yo-you're so wet." Hopper groaned quietly, his voice hoarse with lust. Moving faster in sync with her body, he sped up the circles he drew on her clit. He heard her whispered moans become louder and louder as they moved more frantically. "Shh, we have to be quiet."

"I know," Joyce moaned with a struggle, "I-I can't." She tried to quiet herself but the thrust of his cock made her elicit sounds she didn't know she could make. "I'm so close, Hop." her voice painfully constricted as her legs began to shake. Hopper quickly melded his mouth with hers, hoping it would stifle the noises she couldn't hold back.

Both of them felt their orgasm building stronger and stronger as they moved. Hopper's fingers moved quicker around her aching bundle of

nerves, sending shockwaves down her spine. "Let it go, Joyce, let it go," he spoke quietly but frantically, his thrusts becoming harder and faster.

With a sharp gasp, Joyce felt the coil in her stomach snap. As they rode out the high of their climax, fighting for their breath to return, Joyce leaned back down to capture his lips in hers.

"I love you,"

6. Saturday

Summary for the Chapter:

A quiet last day.

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter is not my pride and joy, okay? I know this sucks but I'm sorry. I ran out of ideas so I went with the feels.

Hopper's parents must've known something was up since he had been quiet and reserved all throughout the morning. Did they know? God, they'd kill him if they found out he had slept with Joyce last night. He had made sure they were asleep when he snuck out but didn't parents always sense this stuff? He couldn't even begin to imagine what Joyce's dad would do to him if he found out.

"So, did you enjoy the fair?" Mrs. Hopper asked with a smile, setting down a plate of eggs and bacon in front of him. Should he stuff his face to avoid talking or excuse himself and say he didn't have an appetite?

"Yes, we had lots of fun. Played games, rode the rides, ate all of the greasy fair food, y'know." Jim said dismissively, afraid he'd say something he couldn't take back. The last thing he needed was to blurt out that he had slept with her.

"I heard through the grapevine that she wasn't putting up with Byers' shit." his father added, smiling into his plate. Jesus, if he had heard that 'through the grapevine' before ten in the morning, what else did he hear?

"When William and I were kids and Joyce's mother was visiting, she did the same thing to Lonnie's dad. Apple doesn't fall far from the tree with the Horowitz girls, I'll tell you that much." the Chief grinned, picking a piece of scrambled egg up on his fork.

"Yeah, she doesn't like him. She calls him *'that Greaser Kid'*." Jim

chuckled under his breath at the thought.

"Well, it's too bad she won't be around to give him all of the problems he's asking for." the Chief mumbled under his breath, taking a sip of milk.

Fuck, he hadn't even remembered. Today was her last day in Hawkins before she went home. The thought made his chest start aching and took his appetite with it. The week had gone by so fast he barely had time to sit back and enjoy it. Jim pushed his plate forward, food almost completely untouched. "I'm uh- I'm gonna go for a walk."

Once he was out of sight, the Chief looked at his wife with confusion written on his face. "What did I say?"

Meredith sighed, patting her husband on the arm. "I think he's just upset about her leaving. He seems quite attached to her already."

As Hopper walked mindlessly, he found his feet taking him to the one place he always went when he was sad. The quarry. Nobody had ever really hung out around there so it was the perfect hiding spot away from everybody. As he made his way up the rocks, he saw someone sitting and staring out at the water. *Wait.*

"Joyce?" he called out to the person. She turned to look for the person calling out her name.

"Hop? What are you doing here?" she asked with surprise in her voice. Well, she certainly didn't expect to see him here.

"I always come here. Better question, what are *you* doing here?" he smiled, sitting next to her on one of the rocks overlooking the water. "How did you know where to find this place?"

"My dad told me about it. I'll leave if you want me too," she added quickly, nervous that maybe she was invading his private time. Maybe he had come here to escape her? He probably didn't want to see her after last night.

"No! Don't go," he replied, putting his hand out to stop her. "We haven't had time to talk, y'know, about last night." he was clearly nervous, tucking his knees up to his chest as he sat next to her.

"Yeah, I know..." she paused to clear her throat. "Uh, I said some things last night that I- *I don't know*." she refused to make eye contact with him. She hadn't meant to say them, but it just sort of slipped before she could stop. "I guess I was afraid you'd think I'm some kind of-"

"I love you too," Hopper whispered breathlessly. When the words finally escaped his mouth, Joyce looked up at him with tears in her eyes. There were words that didn't need to be spoken between the two of them, words they both already knew. She didn't need to say that she would miss him and he didn't need to say that she changed his life; they both already knew.

It took soul searching to define what exactly had Joyce in shreds about leaving. Of course, she'd miss him and of course, they'd be far away, but it wasn't just that black and white. There was fear behind it all. Fear that she'd lose him to some other girl. Fear that she'd never see him again. Fear that he would become only a memory to her and she'd have to go day to day wondering where he is or if he even remembered her. Hell, even she knew that he'd be old enough to be drafted next year. That simple thought caused unbearable pain in her chest. But there were a million different ways she'd be pulled away from him forever.

It was a simple blip in the universe that she'd ever meet him, a small anomaly that she'd fall in love with him. It was unrealistic. What was realistic was the fact that everything stood in their way of being together again. The universe would fix its mistake with a hundred ways to combat their ending together. If she stayed next to him and never let him go, maybe the universe would let them stay together; but going home risked all of that. Any chance of them being together was left up to destiny, and Joyce didn't like those odds. She was scared to leave, for more than any reason of simply missing him. She could lose him forever.

She knew Hawkins was magical. But was it magical enough to somehow bring them together again? Her parents had met the same

exact way and managed to find each other again; how could she be so sure that it would happen for her too? How could she tempt fate and put it in the hands of something else when the odds were beyond in her favor. Things like this didn't happen twice, not in a million years. Her parents got lucky but she didn't count that luck for herself. The world didn't work that way because life is unfair and painful. Just because something amazing happened to them, didn't mean it could ever happen to her too.

She'd have to do this the old-fashioned way. She'd go home and find another mediocre boy to live her life with. None of it would be handed to her like it was with Hopper. She'd go back to where the real world wasn't touched by Hawkins magic; where love didn't just find you. She'd fight to pursue her dream of journalism, settle down with children, and try to fill the void that losing Hopper would leave behind in her heart. She'd never quite be able to feel fulfilled but she knew that's how it would be. If she leaves Hawkins, she has to step further into the life she was assigned. She didn't want that, not just yet.

If she stayed here, she could live the life she wanted. She'd marry Hopper, have beautiful children, and wake up every single morning to his shining blue eyes. They'd be a family and live their lives inside the magic of Hawkins. She could easily picture having everything she'd ever wanted if she stayed put. Sitting around the dinner table with three kids and her husband, watching him coach little league for their kids, having the four of them surprise her at work while she's a journalist for the Hawkins Register. Being able to experience life with the only ones who ever mattered to her seemed easiest if she just never went home. Countless Christmas mornings, movie nights with blanket forts, everything a family could be with a loving husband like Hopper by her side. She could have it all... as long as she stayed right where she was.

The last of her clothes were packed. The room was cleaned and untouched, everything left as if she had never been there. As if none of this ever happened. Joyce glanced over at the nightstand, seeing her little pink diary that held all of her secrets.

Opening it up and uncapping her pen, she tried to think of the right words to finish off the week.

Dear Diary,

I guess this is it. This is the end. The last chapter of my time in Hawkins. It was amazing, beautiful, painful, heartbreaking, and earth-shattering. I've laughed, I've cried, and I've fallen in love. Magic happens here, in the very soil of this small town. I've seen eyes that hold oceans, lips that feel of velvet, skin as soft as silk. Pure magic.

But what goes up, must always come down.

7. Sunday

Summary for the Chapter:

A tearful goodbye.

Notes for the Chapter:

I love me some angst.

This was it. Was it really over? Her bags were packed and waiting at the top of the stairs. She wasn't ready to say goodbye; maybe she never would be. All she could think about was how much convincing it would take for her parents to let her stay. It wouldn't happen, she couldn't get her hopes up like that.

She heard a knock at her door before her dad cautiously entered. "Hey, sweetpea" he greeted sadly. He knew this would happen and he knew how hard it would be once it was all over. He couldn't blame her though, he knew Hawkins had that magic touch for young love. "Are you ready to go?" he asked dreadfully.

"No," she replied with a hint of a pout. She was sitting at the end of the bed, hoping that if she sat still enough that time would pause and this wouldn't happen. She would never be ready to leave, even if it took a million years.

"Jim is outside waiting outside to say goodbye," William said as he moved a strand of hair out of his daughter's face. He knew that it was a faint possibility that he would have to carry her out of the house.

"I don't wanna go home," she whispered, tears threatening to fall from her heartbroken eyes. She couldn't imagine saying goodbye, now it was right in front of her. Why couldn't she just stay? Why did this have to happen? She kept her eyes trained on the floor as she questioned the world's reasoning for the pain she felt.

"I know you don't, Joycie. We'll be back soon, I promise." William put his finger under his chin, tilting her head up to look at him before wiping a tear away from her eye. "But it's time to go."

Joyce stood up next to him, following him down the stairs with dread in every step she took. As she kissed and hugged her grandmother goodbye, she could see Jim waiting on the front lawn. He looked every bit as heartbroken as she was.

"Can I have a minute with him, please?" she asked, her father nodding and retreating back into the house. Joyce turned to look at Hopper, tears welling up in her eyes again. She didn't want to cry in front of him but all control she had was suddenly gone.

As she walked over to him, she nearly knocked him off his feet as they gripped each other in a hug. Joyce felt the tears blow from her eyes as soon as she was clutched into his arms. Without letting her go, Hopper pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

As they let go, Jim cradled her head in his hands while wiping her tears away with his thumbs. He looked like he was about to cry as hard as she was. "I'm gonna miss you." she whimpered, trying to fight the third wave of tears.

"I'm gonna miss you too, Joycie." his lip quivered as he spoke, trying with all of his might not to break down right then and there.

"I love you," Joyce sniffled, wondering how the hell she ended up here. In love with a boy who lived 600 miles away.

"I love you too." he smiled sadly before leaning down and taking her lips into a kiss. When they broke the kiss, Jim felt a stray tear fall down his cheek.

"Please don't forget me," Joyce begged quietly, not caring if she sounded desperate. She *was* desperate.

"How could I?" Jim chuckled with her, realizing that this would be the last time he'd get to look into those beautiful wide doe-eyes. No, he couldn't forget her even if he tried.

Joyce ran her fingers across the hand that was still on his cheek, gently taking ahold of it. Both of them looked over to see her family stepping out of the house. This was it, this was over. She wanted to fall over on the ground and cry but she didn't have the strength. *God,*

if this is a bad dream, please wake me up.

"It was good seeing you, Jimmy." William smiled, nodding at the teen boy who stole his daughter's heart. "We'll be in the car, Joyce."

Hopper looked back down at Joyce. "I guess this is goo-"

"No," she interrupted, shaking her head. "This isn't goodbye. This is 'see you later.'" she sniffled, kissing his cheek one last time. "I love you." and with that, she forced herself to let go of his hand and walk away. She could hear her heart cracking in her chest with each step she took.

Once she got in the car and shut the door, it took all of her strength not to break down and sob. As William shifted the car into drive, Joyce turned to look out of the back window. Once last look as he began to drive away. One last look.

Dear Diary,

I miss him.

Chief Jim Hopper gripped his coffee mug and donut as he walked towards his office. The day had started normal, making a joke about sleeping with officer Callahan's wife, arguing about garden gnomes with Flo, and of course, being an hour late for work. Just another boring, normal day in Hawkins.

While he barked about coffee and contemplation, he wouldn't let his secretary get a word in edgewise; which is exactly why the surprise waiting in his office took his breath away.

"Joyce," he whispered. His heart suddenly hammering in his chest at the sight of her.

"Hop. It's Will," Joyce whispered in a panic, her eyes as wide as dinner plates. "he's missing."

Notes for the Chapter:

YOU SEE WHAT I DID THERE? Anyways, thanks for reading this trash of a fic :)